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Press Release

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Elmore County Man Dies with West Nile Infection

West Nile virus is believed to have contributed to the death of an elderly Elmore County man who died recently. The man, in his 60s, is the third death of an elderly person in the state, and the fourth death associated with West Nile virus in Idaho this year.

“We are very sorry to learn of another person’s death associated with West Nile infection,” says Dr. Leslie Tenglesen, deputy state epidemiologist. “This reminds us that West Nile virus is as close as our back yards and we should ‘Fight the Bite’ of mosquitoes that spread the disease.”

West Nile is can be especially serious in people over the age of 50 because they often have other health conditions or their immune systems weaken as they age. Over 325 Idaho residents have tested positive for West Nile infection this year, with nearly 40 of those reporting neuroinvasive disease, a serious form of the illness.

West Nile virus was first discovered in 1999 in New York and has gradually spread across the United States. Idaho was one of the last states to discover West Nile virus. “We are experiencing this year what many other states experienced after the virus became established in their areas,” Tengelsen says. “If you see mosquitoes, you should consider that they may carry West Nile and take precautions. Enjoy the outdoors, but wear protective clothing and apply insect repellent when appropriate.”

(more)

For personal protection, she advises people to:

- Insect-proof their homes by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on their property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk; and
- Report dead birds to your local Fish and Game office.

West Nile virus does not appear to affect most animals including dogs and cats, but can cause severe illness in horses and certain species of birds. Although there is not a vaccine available for people, there are several vaccines for horses. Approximately one-third of horses which contract West Nile virus will die, so horse owners are encouraged to contact their veterinarian about vaccinating their animals. Horse owners who suspect West Nile viral infection in their animal should contact their veterinarian immediately.

Additional information about the virus is available from the Department of Health and Welfare's web site at <http://www.westnile.idaho.gov> is updated everyday. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Urban Pest Management program also has information available on steps to prevent home-grown mosquito infestations. This information is available on ISDA's web site at <http://www.idahoag.us>.

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(Editors: For more information, please contact Tom Shanahan at 334-0668, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)